While a few general stores were established in rural areas before the Civil War, the clientele of these stores and their contribution to the local economy remained quite limited. Although railroads began to make possible widespread distribution of a growing tide of manufactured goods and produce, cash was scarce for white Southerners and virtually nonexistent for enslaved African-Americans. Infrequent purchases were generally limited to such staples as salt and coffee, which were not produced locally.

There is no evidence for the existence of a commissary, J. Alphonse Prud'homme's store, per se at Bermuda during the antebellum period. The plantation remained relatively self-sufficient before the Civil War. In those cash-poor times, there was simply little demand for "store-bought" goods. In rural areas, especially, an "economy of scarcity" was the rule for almost everybody, black or white, and the foodstuffs and clothing that were doled out by the Prud'hommes to their slaves simply did not require a specialized building out of which to operate. The same was true in the years immediately after the war when corn meal and pork were the only items that the Prud'hommes routinely supplied to their sharecroppers.11 The corn meal may have been produced on the plantation using a steam-powered mill like the "Felton" grist mill that Phanor Prud'homme installed at a new gin on the plantation in 1860. 12

The earliest certain proof of a store at Oakland Plantation is found in the business licenses that Alphonse Prud'homme was

issued in June 1873. On June 3, the State of Louisiana and Natchitoches Parish issued retail merchant licenses to Prud'homme; and, on June 30, the Federal Internal Revenue Service issued him licenses to sell tobacco and liquor, two of the most popular items sold at the store in the nineteenth century. 14 Although it is possible that the store was in existence before 1873, that does not seem likely. Certainly the store was not in existence before 1868, when Prud'homme began keeping a record of the rations of meat that he dispensed to his workers. 15 If it had been constructed before that date, as Dr. Malone points out, it would almost surely have been noted in the plantation journals that were regularly kept through 1867.16 Since the store ledgers begin in 1873, the first licenses were issued then, and that is the year that Alphonse and Emmanuel Prud'homme formally divided their father's old plantation, it is probable that the store opened that year as well. 17

The first documented reference to the store that I've located was in an 1874 ledger item: "1874, Feb. 15 "Paid act in Store \$18.151" regarding the account of Seraphin Edmonds. However, the store was probably built in 1868 when the switch to sharecropping commenced. If it had been built in 1867, references would surely have been made regarding its construction in that year's journal.

The administrator's account for 1868 indicates that on December 28, 1868, "tohands — their pay & share for 1868,... \$3,449.98" and for 1867, pay for hands was \$594.33. The ledger does show, however, that after all deductions were made for the sharecroppers, most were slightly in debt to the Prudhomme

estate at the beginning of the 1869 season.

No record of the store's construction has been located, but it is likely that all of the lumber in the building was sawn at Alphonse Prud'homme's saw mill across Old River in the Kisatchie Hills. In operation before the Civil War, the saw mill resumed operation after the war and supplied lumber for the Prud'hommes' reconstruction of their plantations' buildings as well as to Matthew Hertzog, the Metoyers, and many others. 18

The modes of transporting goods to the plantation store changed over the years. Alphonse II recalled that "when it first started, it [the supplies] used to come up the river with barges way back yonder before the steamboats' time. And not only that, Papa [Phanor Prudhomme II] said they had an old overseer here and an Indian guide that used to leave here with wagons and go down to what they call Rapides, down where the rapids were in Red River, and meet boats there and get supplies."  $^{20,1}$ 

- 1. Oakland Plantation Prud'homme's Store HSR National Park Service
  pp.14 16
- 14. Original licenses can be found in Series 3.2.8, folder 461, Prud'homme Coll., UNC
- 15. See Series 3.1.2, Folder 166, Prud'homme Coll., UNC
- 16. Malone, "Oakland Plantation ...," p. 127.
- 17. "Plantation and Store Ledgers, 18731982," Series 3.1.6, folder 289, Prud'homme Coll., UNC.
- 18. "Lumber and Sawmill Books, 1860-1883," Series 3.2.10, folders 468-469, Prud'homme Coll., UNC Only two of these books, 1860-1862

and 1882-1883, have survived.

- 19. ibid., p. 126, 162-3.
- 20. Malone, "Oakland Plantation ...,"